

Interview with Robert O. Blake

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE

Interviewed by: Horace G. Torbert

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Q: This is a Foreign Service oral history interview with Ambassador Robert O. Blake made on May 7th, 1990 at DACOR Bacon House in Washington, DC. The interviewer is Horace G. Torbert.

Ambassador Blake, as you know, we were delighted to have your interview December 29th, 1988, and I apologize for being so long in getting back to you. We would like to get a little more detail, because that was an excellent summary of your career, but I think many of the things you did are worth much more detailed comment, if it's all right with you. You've told us how you got into the Service, and that was very interesting indeed, and your training. And then you told us something about your first assignment, which was in Managua, Nicaragua. Anything you wish to say about a period before that is fine, but I would suggest we might start in Managua and you might tell me a little something about what you found when you got there, who your bosses were, what kind of training you got, which was rather hit or miss, I guess, in those days. It was for me anyway, I know. So would you start in and tell me, in the first place, who was in charge in Managua when you got there, and what kind of a fellow was he?

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BLAKE: When I got to Managua in 1947 we had no official relations with the Nicaraguan government because we had broken relations when Tacho Somoza decided to throw his uncle out of office just after he had him elected in a phony election. This was a little bit more than Secretary Marshall could stand, so we did break relations. The chargé d'Affaires was Maury Bernbaum, who was definitely one of the most outstanding young middle grade officers that the Service had at that time, and was given this job because of its sensitivity. One of the problems was that General Somoza, living in the post-war period when arms, from airplanes to tanks, to anything, were relatively easy to come by, had the idea of perhaps establishing a Pax Nicaragua for Central America and the surrounding areas; and we were constantly trying to use what influence we had in Nicaragua - and it was substantial even though we didn't have relations - to keep Tacho from invading Costa Rica, invading Honduras, and in one incredible case from bombing Caracas where the very newly installed democratic government was not to his pleasure. Maury got, as I recall, a certain number of fairly specific instructions about keeping Tacho from doing this, or doing that, and was pretty much left on his own to figure out how to do it. And one of the ways to do it involved me. Being the most junior officer in the place, without any family, and with a good fast car, on one occasion they sent me to the Costa Rican border to hang out for several days, and just simply bluff the Nicaraguans out of going any further. Another time I was sent to Puerto Cabezas on the Atlantic Ocean where we learned that a Nicaraguan controlled aircraft was about to bomb Caracas. I literally sat out at the airport for the better part of the week. They had no capacity to fly off at night, so as soon as darkness would fall, I would go back to town. Results; we succeeded in stopping..., between that and a series of other measures, the bomber from taking off from Puerto Cabezas. I often wonder about the fact that nobody put a bullet in my head in any of these situations, but when you're young and think you can do anything, nothing is going to stop you. I am constantly amazed at how much latitude we had from Washington.

Q: This is hardly what you are trained for.

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BLAKE: Yes, no training at FSI along those lines. As a matter of fact I found that the training that I got in the Foreign Service Institute helped me understand consular work, but there was no training on the political side.

Q: For example, how to stop an invasion.

BLAKE: Exactly, or even whether you should stop an invasion. I found that Maury Bernbaum was a first class person. We were, of course, confronted by the fact that General Somoza was no democrat, but neither was he a hard-nosed, brutal dictator. His relations with his people were relatively relaxed, and he more or less went under the rubric that what was good for Somoza was good for Nicaragua. He was essentially investing in the country rather than taking out millions for Swiss bank accounts, at least as far as we knew at the time.

Q: Some other members of the family perhaps did later.

BLAKE: I understand that changed. His son, Tachito, who later became president was a very different kind of a fellow from his father. But in any case, in Nicaragua, at least, the embassy - not the CIA - was the main political actor. We were in fact kept quite close in touch with opposition groups, sometimes at some risk. We weren't trying to hide the fact that we were doing it, and we even to some extent kept touch with the people who you might have called proto-Sandinistas, the people who were holing up in the bush. There was no question in the minds of the Nicaraguans that, the United States, was the major factor which decided which way security affairs would go. It wasn't like the old days in the banana republics. Finally, we did renew our relations with Tachito, I can't remember why we did it but I guess we decided enough was enough. In any case we were a major factor and people watched everything we did.

Q: I take it, however, during your time there, we never actually got an Ambassador there, did we?

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BLAKE: Oh, yes. We did get an Ambassador, and his name was George Shaw. He had been a long-time consul in places along the Mexican border. He was not in any way of the same class as Maury. He was a man of limited vision, a person who more or less followed instructions from Washington when they came, a perfectly nice guy. We all loved him, but he wasn't a strong person, at least at any time that I was there. I was only in Nicaragua for a little over a year and a half because I'd been chosen for Soviet language and area training. But Nicaragua was a wonderful experience of diplomacy in action, success working under the rubric of a general instruction: don't ask too many questions, just do it and report it.

Q: Was there any, what you might call routine, conventional work that you did at that time - either consular, or anything of that sort?

BLAKE: At that time all junior officers were rotated around to different jobs. For a short period I did trade reports, which I hated. And then I became administrative officer because the administrative officer went crazy.

Q: Over the job?

BLAKE: I never was quite sure. He was a wonderful older fellow named Linton Cook. He had spent most of his career in Italy, with the soft and lovely life of small Italian posts. He just wasn't able to stand up under the Nicaraguan heat, disease, and the pressures of the job. I always felt lucky that I just got through that business because my accounts for disbursing were off as much as two or three million dollars, which of course were errors in the way they were reported rather than anything else. I never had to pay anybody anything.

Q: If it's big enough, you don't pay it.

BLAKE: That's right. I also started a commissary for the Embassy. We never had one before and I hadn't realized how dangerous it was to keep certain foods at least pretty

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cool. As a result, a lot of my canned goods exploded one night spattering the whole place with rotten ham. We lost a lot of money. But they were wonderful experiences. Then I went into the political section. Even before, when I was assigned to other sections, I was called on by Maury to go do political reporting and, indeed, we looked at the job as everybody being a part of a team. That was the right way to do it.

Q: Just to get a sense of proportion, roughly how many Americans were there on the post? How big was the staff?

BLAKE: I suppose that we were 30, no Marines, the communications load was much lighter than it later became. We had a Military Attach#, and we had the vestiges of a wonderful group which was called the Nicaraguan Canal Commission. Of course, we never had built the canal...

Q: We were still studying it.

BLAKE: The Army was determined to study it as long as the wonderful boat on Lake Nicaragua held out, and until the colonel who was head of it reached retirement age. It was a strange remnant of the past.

Q: That is great. I think that gives us a very, very good flavor for that, and it interested me because I had a son there in the Peace Corps later and I've had friends down there. As you said, you put in for Russian language training, and you went and got it first in the Department, and then at Columbia. I notice the total time involved in that was considerably less than a year that you were studying. Did you really get enough Russian in that length of time to be able to use it when you got to Moscow, or were you still working on it there - well, you obviously still worked on it there, but did you feel that was enough to do you some good?

BLAKE: Oh, sure. By the time I got there I could speak fairly good Russian. I was young, and I was not afraid of the language.

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Q: In your '20s it's easier than in your forties or '50s.

BLAKE: Very much so. We were working on Russian eight hours a day. I was supposed to have stayed longer in New York, and then somebody got sick - I can't remember the exact reasons - and they sent me to Moscow earlier. They sent me in, I believe, March and I wasn't originally supposed to go there until the end of the summer. But that was fine. I learned a lot at Columbia and could have learned more, but I was gung-ho, ready to go.

Q: It is amazing what you can learn when you're young. You got to Moscow I guess during Ambassador Kirk's time. He was already there when you got there?

BLAKE: Absolutely. He'd been there about a year; I'm not entirely sure about that.

Q: He got there in April of '49 according to the records.

BLAKE: Yes, that's right, about a year.

Q: So he had been there a while, and then you lapped over on Kennan just a little.

BLAKE: No, I left just before he arrived in Moscow. The thing that distinguished Moscow, from my point of view, was the first class nature of my colleagues, both in the American Embassy and in other embassies. All the embassies were limited in numbers by the Russians. Admiral Kirk was an outstanding person. He had a keen geopolitical sense, was ready to take risks, and was tough as nails as far as the Russians were concerned. Yet he was open-minded and ready to think of them not just as enemies, but as fellow players in the game.

Q: Or at least human beings.

BLAKE: Exactly. He was a man of vast experience in the Navy and Navy Intelligence, and a very close friend of Dean Acheson's - a personal friend, which gave a special dimension to what we were doing there. He was a man of enormous energy; and a very

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good listener. He wanted the opinions and advice of his staff, and was free in accepting them. We all had the highest admiration for him. His number two most of the time I was there, was Wally Barbour, absolutely solid as a rock; a person who, again, had all different kinds of experience, a person who was just as steady, and just as unflappable as Ambassador Kirk. They got along marvelously. And then we had a cast of characters like Elim O'Shaughnessy who handled European affairs, Dick Service who handled Far Eastern affairs, Ray Thurston who did Middle Eastern affairs, John Emerson who did Far Eastern... really first class people... and Walt Stoessel, Mac Toon.

Q: You had the entire cast of Kremlinologists really, or future Kremlinologists.

BLAKE: That's right. Everybody was thinking. Everybody had open minds. I found only one person, and in fact I can't even remember his name, who you would call a cold warrior who was sort of uncompromisingly against the Russians just because they were who they were. And, of course, he didn't have that much influence because there was a much more sophisticated embassy approach. Just to give you an example, just before the outbreak of the Korean War, the Embassy under Ambassador Kirk was involved in a major exercise which as far as I know was self-generated, looking at whether we should reestablish relations with the Chinese Communists. Based on the insight of a number of people - Emerson, Service, and indeed Wally Barbour - that the Chinese and the Russians were not the allies that they were thought to be. I don't remember seeing any more than scraps of evidence; but it seemed to all of us that these two great powers with such different approaches to their national interests, could not be the solid friends forever. It was the feeling of Ambassador Kirk that, while it might not be possible to split them, at least in the short run, in the longer run there was no question but that by establishing relations with the Chinese, we could at least exploit the contradictions between them. All this ended very rapidly with the outbreak of the Korean War, which we didn't have a clue was coming. I was off on a trip in the south of the country with another fellow from the Embassy, Scott Lyon. We were being followed much more closely than we had been on other trips, in some places to the point of real harassment. But when we got to Odessa, one morning

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we were forbidden to leave our rooms, and held there for several days. We were given all the vodka and all the caviar we could consume. We had no idea why or what was in store for us until we were put on a plane and sent back to Moscow without continuing our trip. It has always been a question on our mind, if anybody in Washington had a clue of what was about to break out. Because if we didn't it's a very different age from what we're in now with all kinds of satellite intelligence that should lead one to have some kind of a warning. If we did as far as I know, there was no projection of that in Moscow.

Q: In my own case, I was leaving Madrid at that time on home leave and I went down to Barcelona, in a nice peaceful world, and got on a rather primitive ship that didn't have much communications and I'd been at sea for three days before we got our first wireless communication that told about the war as on - that's the way the surprise came at that time.

Were there any specific things that you did at that time that you haven't mentioned before that you think of as particular operational interest, so to speak, in Moscow? I know you did a little of everything, and everybody did everything, I suppose, at that time.

BLAKE: I think I spoke before about the very interesting experiences in the consular section.

Q: Yes. On dual nationality problems.

BLAKE: Yes, that was sad, but I'm not sure there's anything more to say about that. It was quite important at that time. It was a period when we changed our presumption that probably we could get some real concessions on these problems from our former wartime allies. to recognizing that we were in for a totally adversarial relationship. This happened little by little. Even the outbreak of the Korean War didn't totally change it because it wasn't particularly reflected in a changed attitude by the Russians, we went to great pains to try to find out about relations between Russia and the Chinese, and the Koreans. As far as I remember, we only got bits and pieces, scraps of things. The result over two years, was

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our conclusion that we were in for the toughest kind of a cold war approach, at least as long as Stalin was alive. Of course, he died in 1953 after I left the place. In fact, we were following with enormous interest the unveiling of the so-called "Doctor's plot" in Moscow, where, in the eyes of those few Russians that we could tap - and indeed there were very, very few such people, the Doctor's Plot was the first sign of a major purge which could sweep away a whole new generation of leaders. Now, in fact, that didn't happen; but whether that was because Stalin changed his mind, whether he got sick, or whether his comrades put him down; we were never able to determine.

Everything was a detective story there. Everything was trying to put together tiny pieces of information.

Q: I've been a little bit in Eastern Europe although not Moscow, and I know the kind of rumors that live on, yes. There's one sort of operational and philosophical question your citizenship problem there does rise, and that is the question of fairly extensive use of local employees as we have always done, although we're doing it less, I take it, now than we used to. Did you come away at that time, or do you have now in thinking back on it, any particular thoughts as to whether we can afford to use local employees, which we all know give us certain values or certain insights on the community and that sort of thing, but on the other hand, do pose a rather major security risk.

BLAKE: It seemed to me at that time, and I guess I still think, that we got more out of using local employees than we've lost. What we probably got out of it, for one thing, was a better understanding on the part of the Soviet government of what we were really up to. There was always this sense among the Soviets, but not all of them, that there was a great conspiracy and that a lot more was going on in the Embassy than really was. And some of the Russians that we had working for us were very sophisticated, people who were far beyond what they pretended to be. For example, one woman was a language instructor, an Armenian lady. She spent a lot of time discussing in Russian with us, our attitudes toward the Soviet Union, what we thought we were doing, I suspect that she

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was liberated enough that she could give Soviet intelligence at least a fairly unvarnished picture of what we were doing. Of course, the sheer load of work that had to be done to keep an embassy operating in a country short of food, short of everything, trying to supply a relatively big diplomatic mission from outside. To do so we needed trucks and laborers. I never felt that the Russians got very much information that they couldn't get otherwise. Of course, we were so careful about any thing secret. We would never talk about secret matters even in our offices. If there was something very secret, then we would actually go outside. As a matter of fact, we didn't know that much about what was going on in Moscow. We were kept from knowing much by our own people in Washington. We were on a need to know basis, which was of course, the right thing to do. But I can't imagine that we could have done anywhere near as good a job as I think we did in giving the sense of the context in which our Soviet policy was developing, both in Moscow and in the rest of the country, without the help of some Russians. Now, in fact, we didn't get very much from them personally about what they thought, or what was happening, and we were really quite careful not to ask them very many questions, or to probe them very deeply. We had other ways to get that.

Q: But did you have a chance for at least some human contact which gave you, I always felt, a very valuable additional insight into the nature of the people?

BLAKE: Yes. For example, it was very clear too, not only from casual contact, how basically friendly towards Americans the Russians were. As a matter of fact, we personally experienced no anti-American feeling even in the coldest part after the Korean War. People would tell us when we were on trips, I could talk really rather openly with Russians, how much they appreciated what we'd done in the war in 1950. We were very close to the war still. It was also clear that while they didn't really necessarily believe all that we said, they didn't believe what they were hearing on the Soviet radio either. They simply were conditioned not to believe anything from official or semi-official sources, Soviet or Armenian.

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Q: From there you moved on to Tokyo. Did you go directly there? Did you go home first?

BLAKE: I went home first.

Q: Were you by this time married, or was that later?

BLAKE: No, I wasn't married when I left Moscow.

Q: It's interesting to see when you started having a family.

BLAKE: That was a bit later. I got to Tokyo just after the famous May Day riots which took place right at the end of the occupation. Bob Murphy had come as the first U.S. ambassador to Japan, he was one of the people whose views - particularly his operational approach - were enormously important to me. In fact, Bob Murphy was quite right wing in many of his views - right wing of the time. But it never seemed to interfere with his judgement, his ability to size up situations with keen intuition. He was a very strong Irish Catholic who was from the roots of his being anti-Communist. And to some extent that was reflected, I had a lot to do with him first in Japan, and later when he went back to Washington as first Assistant Secretary for International Organizations, and then as Under Secretary for Political Affairs. Then again I saw a lot of him while he was still in the later job and I was in Tunisia. His finesse, his ability to work with other people, his ability to be tough and get away with it was something which had an enormous impact on me.

Q: I take it that he was the man who took over from the military government? So you had quite an organizational job there to do, whatever he did, right from the beginning.

BLAKE: That's right. During the occupation the proto diplomatic mission had been the Political Advisor's office, while its staff was expanded, some didn't change too much. But the center of gravity of relations with Japan changed, from the military headquarters to the ambassador, and he was very determined that that that was the way it should be. Of course, he was careful to keep in touch with the U.S. commander. There was no

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question who was boss, it was Bob. He had a clear signal from the President - by now it was President Eisenhower whom he'd known very well when he, Bob, had been High Commissioner in Germany - that he was the boss. And Ike, not being a great lover of other military leaders, wanted it that way. However, I don't really remember there being any particular spats with the military. In the end, the fact that Murphy was so tough probably was the reason why he was sent off to be sort of Political Adviser in Korea, which he was bitter about (though it was a terrific put-down) and why then he was not sent back to the States. I think that all that left a very, very bad taste in his mouth. However, I never heard him speak about it, and I knew him pretty well. He was very careful about such things. But I do know that he felt the State Department hadn't stood up for him strongly enough.

Q: And that was when Graham Allison came as U.S. Ambassador to Japan?

BLAKE: Yes. Allison was the Japanese language officer, specialist in Japanese affairs, but not a strong man in the sense that Bob Murphy was.

of the more interesting aspects that I really didn't know very much about, and in retrospect I wish I'd looked into more, was the beginning of CIA to assert his position in the country, and to try to develop its role as against the role of the military intelligence. One of the really interesting aspects of that was the work that Bob Murphy had me do - when I say Bob Murphy, it wasn't as if I went up and took orders directly from Bob Murphy although I saw a lot of him. It always came through Bill Leonhart, who was very, very active, very smart, and head of the Political Section there.

Q: And he was relatively young for that job at the time too, wasn't he?

BLAKE: Yes. The DCM was a man named Bill Turner who was a long time Far Eastern expert, quite competent, not particularly articulate, but a person on whom Bob Murphy depended to run the Embassy so he could think about the big things. Bob was definitely a

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politically minded ambassador who wanted to keep full control, but wanted somebody else to run the thing for him.

I started to talk about CIA - I think that's worth pursuing just a minute. When I look back, I look in wonder at some of the projects they were undertaking. One was, how do we change the Japanese to make the Japanese system even more "democratic", that General MacArthur had done, more like our own. The pretentiousness of some of the assumptions about the applicability of US political systems to Japanese experience, the sense that we could really influence a major shift in the way Japanese did business through covert propaganda activities, and through intellectual argument with the Japanese: When you look back this is absolutely unbelievable. We collectively took issue with the CIA staff, taking the position that this was simply beyond our American capability. But even some of our embassy people were inclined, if you will, to have a sort of a Pax Americana of viewpoint. If I remember these things accurately, and your memory can always play little tricks on you, seems quite amazing to me.

Q: Well, they were trying to run Japan like we tried to run some parts of Latin America, I guess, in that sense.

BLAKE: That's right. And I think also CIA wanted to run it instead of the way the military had run for so many years.

Q: Do you have anything more to say about Japan?

BLAKE: Not much. My work was very interesting - political reporting. I learned to speak relatively good Japanese so that I could understand what was going on. I tried to get to the bottom of the great conundrum that we all did, of how Japanese opinion was formed; what were the real dimensions of the consensus process on which Japan works, I don't think it had much success. We always overestimated our ability to impact that consensus forming process. We always underestimated the time it would take to bring about change, and I don't think despite all the information we had, that we had as clear a sense of what

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post-war Japan was about as we thought we did, and as I feel we later did have. There was a transition from the period under the military, where we could demand any kind of information, and probably got any kind of answer we wanted to get, to the slower process of really understanding the depths of resistance in the Japanese character to a lot of the basic things that we had tried to accomplish under the occupation.

Q: Who was the principal Japan honcho on the Department at that time? Walter Robertson, or did he have somebody else that was primarily the Japanese man?

BLAKE: A man named Ken Young. We always thought of Walter as essentially interested in China, and essentially uninterested in Japan.

Q: Nationalist China.

BLAKE: Perhaps. I don't know whether that's correct or not. It wasn't anything that really came into my attention. I simply don't remember.

The only thought I would add, is that in all honesty when I left Japan, I recognized that I knew less about Japan than I thought I had known when I arrived.

Q: Well, I think that's a very healthy attitude to take. But it is a totally different civilization. My guess is that the Russians are a little closer to us in culturization than the Japanese.

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: In January 1954 you came back to the Department. In your previous interview you had a good summary of that very important assignment on the Soviet desk, and as officer in charge of Soviet affairs. But I think we could use quite a little more detail on that. Among other things you, were on the U.S. delegation at the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina and Korea. And I wonder if you have some particular memories about that conference, particularly the principal leaders of the various delegations, and senior people,

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including our own, of what the issues were. Is that something that you'd want to talk about?

BLAKE: Yes, indeed. When we went to Geneva, the presumption was that we were going to talk largely about Korea. In fact, while the talks on Korea took up a lot of the time, they were almost totally unproductive. The real center of attention was Vietnam: Dien Bien Phu, the collapse of French military resistance, the pull-out of the French from really active responsibility, and the beginning of a major transfer to the United States of that responsibility.

Q: Unfortunately.

BLAKE: It was very clear there that the leading person at the conference was Foster Dulles. Although he wasn't there the whole time; he came and went. Alexis Johnson was the working leader of our delegation. But Foster Dulles was the proponent of the idea that the United States could, and should, assume major responsibility in Vietnam and south east Asia. He felt we were in a position of strength for negotiating with the Chinese, and the Russians. He, incidentally, tried his best to divide the Russians from the Chinese. He thought this was possible. After all, this was '54 and it was a good four or five years before it became totally clear that there was this sharp split. Molotov was at the end of his career, cold as ice, obviously not at all in sync with Zhou En-lai, who was certainly from my memory, the dominating personality on the other side of the conference.

Q: How did we handle relations at that time...how did Dulles, for instance, and Johnson, handle the relations with Zhou En-lai? Did we have normal communication around the table with them?

BLAKE: None at all.

Q: Did we sit at the same table? I can't remember how it worked.

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BLAKE: In a sense, yes we did. There were different physical arrangements for each of the conferences. If I remember correctly, and I'm not absolutely sure of this, in the Korean conference it was a little like the way it is in the United Nations, with the presiding officer up in front, and a series of people sort of ranked behind. There were lots of government representatives there. Everybody who had participated even with a few soldiers in the Korean War, countries like Mexico and Colombia. The Vietnamese conference was much smaller. We were around a big table with the communist groups on one side and the rest of us on the other. As I remember, it was a sort of a round table but split in the middle, or an oval table perhaps. But of course, an awful lot of the real negotiations didn't take place there. It took place between ourselves, and others, in the corridors, and in Geneva's hotels. We had no direct contact with the Chinese, except for one man from CIA who was on our delegation. I've forgotten his name. He was a colonel who had been with Zhou En-lai in Yenan. He maintained a certain amount of contact on a covert basis - not covert from our point of view, but covert from the press. We wanted to be sure that the Chinese always got our message with the strength that we wanted, whatever was said in open sessions.

In the corridors and receptions we never talked to the Chinese although we'd be right next to them. If we came to a group that we were in, we had orders to walk away. They would do the same. On one occasion when Foster Dulles had a chance to shake Zhou En-lai's hand, he very purposely snubbed him. But it was a wonderful sort of world where there were Laotian princes and princesses, and the Emperor Bao Dai. Our people would go down to the Riviera to talk to one or the other of the Indochinese groups, including Sihanouk, and the communist Prince of Laos. It was a heady combination of the unreal world of old Vietnam which was disappearing, and hard, tough realities. One of the questions was, what kind of a regime would be formed in the two Vietnams? What kind of a security framework would be developed? This was the moment that Foster Dulles launched the idea of SEATO which, as you will recall, was supposed to be the Far Eastern equivalent of NATO for solidifying the ring around the communist Bloc. I can't remember all the details but I know that a number of us were doubtful whether an organization which

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included such disparate countries as Pakistan, and Thailand, plus a series of countries that we felt were very, very weak - the Philippines for example, would have any strength and legitimacy.

Q: And not all that interested in each other.

BLAKE: Exactly. We told the Secretary that we thought this was a bad idea, and were told to, "Shut up." That this was the way it was going to be. Seato would give legitimacy to our military intervention in south east Asia. It never was clear in my mind whether this was what President Eisenhower wanted, or just what Foster wanted. But that debate stopped not very long after it started.

Q: This was Dulles' same idea, in a way, as Henry Kissinger later having a world global plan that he felt he could work out.

BLAKE: That's right. And, of course, the Baghdad Pact was the other part of this general strategy.

Q: Yes, which was even in a way less successful. In a way SEATO had some left-overs that had some use, I think.

BLAKE: Yes, and the other side of it is that even if it wasn't a complete success, perhaps things would have been worse if it hadn't existed. At least it gave a tangible sign of US commitment to the area. And maybe that's what really was needed - a commitment in east Asia broader than just Vietnam.

Q: Another vehicle for consultation.

BLAKE: Yes. I'm not sure we were right in this, but at least the Foreign Service establishment then was not entirely ready to buy off on this sort of Pax Americana concept without a bit more argument.

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Q: Did you yourself have any particular subcommittee, or any particular area, that you remember, that you worked on, or you led some part of some problem that you dealt with? Or were you generally secretary to the delegation?

BLAKE: Most of my work, of course, was to follow very closely and report on what the Russians were doing, what they were saying, thinking, discussing with them - certainly not at the top level although I would go with the Secretary, or one of the other top people when that would happen. These meetings weren't particularly productive. Molotov was pretty uncommunicative. Obviously, in retrospect, the Russians were having plenty of problems with the Chinese who simply were not ready to let the Russians establish hegemony down in that area. But a lot of that came out later. I think it's pretty easy to overestimate our influence at the time in Sino-Soviet difficulties. We did know there were problems.

In addition, I had a liaison responsibility with the Indians. Each of us on the U.S. delegation had middle grade contact in one or another friendly delegation that we were supposed to keep advised of what was going on. I was with Foster when he went to see Krishna Menon who was hanging around the Geneva Conference in a very unwanted way, and being a real troublemaker.

Q: Was he in the official delegation of the Indian government?

BLAKE: He was Foreign Minister, and the Indians didn't have any official position on the Vietnamese conference. They were simply observers trying to be sure that they weren't cut out. They felt that they should have been a member of the conference. They thought correctly that any subject as fundamental to Indian security as Vietnam, they were improperly being excluded. I don't remember whether they ever made any formal protests. Later, of course, they were made members of the Vietnam Armistice Commission, that oversaw the results of the security arrangements which were established for each one of the Indo Chinese countries. It may well have been that their insistence paid off for them in that. But Krishna Menon was considered by all of us not only a terrible pain in the

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neck, but to be essentially very pro-communist. And I have no reason, from everything we saw, to doubt that that's exactly what he was. I don't mean that he was a member of the Communist Party. I've never seen anything to indicate that. But he saw India's interests as being very close to those of the Soviet Union. He's quite anti-Chinese, as you know.

Did I tell the story in the earlier one about Dulles' meeting with Krishna Menon?

Q: *No.*

BLAKE: It's rather fascinating. It has no great policy impact. Foster Dulles was invited to tea by Menon, and I went with him. When Foster came in and sat down, Krishna Menon asked him if he'd like tea, Dulles said, "Yes." Menon said, "Would you like pepper in your tea?" And Foster, thinking perhaps this was the way Indians did it, or there was some kind of special pepper, said, "Mr. Foreign Secretary if you suggest it, okay." And Krishna Menon laughed and laughed, and said to Foster, "It just shows that you know nothing about tea, nothing about the British, and you're a damned fool. Anybody who would accept the idea of putting pepper in their tea must be crazy." While this might not be exactly the way it was said, this was the thrust of it. Foster Dulles was so put off that he really was ineffective in the rest of the interview. He considered this, I think correctly, a personal insult, and sort of a sign of what Krishna Menon, and therefore probably the Indian government, thought about us in the whole affair.

Q: *Unfortunately, most of my Indian colleagues in various places, have had the same type of experience, an old trend by Krishna Menon.*

BLAKE: I remember one time, there was a long interval between two parts of the conference, arranged ostensibly so that Zhou En-lai could go back to China to talk with Mao Zedong and get "new instructions." It obviously wasn't the whole reason. We felt that they thought their position with Ho Chi Minh, , must be strengthened. Zhou En-lai

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went back to Beijing through Hanoi. The Russians were furious that he hadn't gone back through Moscow.

Q: You were in Geneva how long, roughly? How long did you stay out there last? Did you go back and forth?

BLAKE: No, I stayed in Geneva the whole time. During the period between the two sessions, I went first to Vienna, and then to Hungary. I couldn't believe what I saw there. The Hungarians, after Moscow, seemed so open. Naturally we thought every Hungarian must be an agent provocateur. I then went down to Yugoslavia, then came back to Geneva.

Q: You've covered quite a bit of your normal job on the desk there before, but I wonder if you could give us a little more about your work with the Russians? You saw a good deal of Khrushchev during his visit to the U.S.. Could you give us a little more on him, and what your historical perspective on Khrushchev was?

BLAKE: Khrushchev immediately impressed me on meeting him as a man of enormous vitality. He had eyes that just sort of sparkled right out of his head - little pig eyes. He looked like an old collective farmer, fat, but very active. He moved around with enormous energy, extremely peasant like. He always had some kind of a Russian saying to quote that seized the situation of the moment. And he was very vulgar. Things that he would say in Russian were often not repeatable. On the other hand, he was a person who was enormously open to new ideas. He was a person who made no bones about the fact that he thought the way the Soviet Union was moving along had to be changed; no good could come from the enormous deadness. He was clearly a gambler, as we saw later in the Cuban missile crisis; as we saw in his decision to expend an enormous amount of money and prestige on unsuccessfully opening up the virgin lands. He was very interested in American agriculture, and asked very good questions. He thought Bob Garth out in Iowa was the finest person he ever met. But he was absolutely uncompromising in proclaiming

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the superiority of communism over American capitalism. Yet if he saw something on his trip that he thought the Russians should copy, he would copy it. He tended to be quite domineering with his own staff - they were scared as hell of him.

Q: This sounds more and more like Lyndon Johnson to me. Well, it is, you know, very similar.

BLAKE: He played the canny farmer. He made no pretension to cultivation, or culture. And he was not very much interested in the cultural exchanges that we tried to involve him in. He'd go along with his staff, but it didn't particularly turn him on.

Q: Was he generally trying to work out something in his relation with us, do you think? Was he genuinely distressed over U2, for instance, and things like that?

BLAKE: Of course, the U2 came later, so I really don't know. From my own experience, he obviously knew, in a way that we didn't feel that earlier Soviet leaders did, how dangerous nuclear warfare was. He expressed quite openly the idea that from the Russian point of view, nuclear warfare was simply unacceptable, and one felt that he really did think so. We didn't feel that he was trying to create new detente, or anything like that. He was trying to beat us at our game. He was ready to copy whatever there was in our system that would strengthen his. His working assumption seemed to be that the Soviet system was redeemable, even as critical of it as he was. He obviously felt that the terror that had happened under Stalin and his henchmen, was totally unacceptable. He wanted to have as much contact as possible with the west so that the Russia could learn. That was a big change. And, of course, in 1956 his denunciation of Stalin was the beginning of an absolutely incredible psychological and political change in the Soviet Union.

I remember so well our getting the first copies of that secret speech, I believe through the Israelis. And then CIA got another copy from another source.

Q: Yugoslavia, wasn't it?

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BLAKE: The one I remember is Poland, maybe Yugoslavia too. There were differences among the texts. But big parts of the text were exactly the same. And it was only later that we found out that he'd done what political people often do, follow the text, but then he'd extemporize. The listeners would be following along the text, and then they'd sort of scribble on the edges, so we'd get a slightly different version as it went along. Later he gave an outspoken and a fairly sophisticated analysis in his book, "Khrushchev Remembers." I had a very interesting talk the other day with Murray Gart, who was the man in "Time Life" responsible for putting together this book, and he said a couple things that were quite fascinating to me after all this time. First of all, he said that all of the material for the book had come in the form of tapes which they were able to match with Khrushchev's voice print so that they know it was Khrushchev talking all the time. He would not tell me how they got them. He said that it was quite interesting to see the way Khrushchev would say, "I'm sitting out on this bench overlooking this beautiful river at my dacha," and talk about the birds, and the trees and everything else warming himself up. Then he'd start off on a political subject and his interviewer could hardly stop him. A lot of the material was fairly unusable because it contained enormous detail about this battalion and that battalion during World War II. When he was a principal political commissar in the armies, which had some military interest, but not very much otherwise from Time's perspective.

Q: Again, it may make a good Ph.D. thesis some day.

BLAKE: Absolutely, if the tapes still exist. Time never let, not even now, the Russians have direct access to the tapes because a) they were afraid they might be destroyed, and b) they thought there might be things in there the KGB could use, that we didn't even recognize, to hurt some Russians. So the text that came out was very heavily edited.

Q: That's an interesting history on that. Is this Gart who did that? Is he the son of the farmer?

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BLAKE: Oh, no, no. His name is G-A-R-T. He was one of the top guys in "Time Life", now retired.

Q: I'm sorry. I just heard the name wrong. This is exactly the kind of thing that I think is very useful to get. I don't want to take all the time on this phase of your career, but are there any other major things that you didn't cover before on your time on the Soviet desk?

BLAKE: I'm not sure. I can't remember exactly what I said before.

Q: Did you have any particular recollection of any of the other people that you may have dealt with in the Department?

BLAKE: Did I tell there about my brush with Senator McCarthy?

Q: You did indeed, and that is very interesting. I now see how you got access to Dulles because you'd seen a lot of him recently, but I think that was a very interesting story.

BLAKE: My access, let's face it, was not on matters of high policy.

Q: I had somewhat the same. I'd take notes when my Foreign Ministers or Prime Ministers would come.

BLAKE: That's right. Then we had all kinds of tricky little operational problems - defections, things that Dulles wanted handled a certain way. It was probably easier to talk to me than to go through the Assistant Secretary, but I didn't feel, very frankly, that I was in close communion with what the President and Foster were thinking about things. I had wide access to communications of all kinds, and they seemed expressly what the President had in mind.

Q: Do you have any particular memory of any of the other top officers in the Department at that time - people like Hoover, or Merchant, or Ellsworth Bunker, or Beam?

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BLAKE: Oh, sure. Hoover was considered somewhat of a nonentity, was largely disregarded by Dulles, who seemed to be unhappy that Hoover had been put in there in this job. Libby Merchant was close to Dulles.

Q: Dulles was very fond of him.

BLAKE: Yes, Libby was a wonderful guy to work for and work with. Jake Beam was the meat and potatoes guy, the tough minded, experienced professional who understood Moscow, understood the Germans, and understood Central Europe. We all had a lot of affection for him. He was certainly our day-to-day man. His Deputy, Burke, was considered extremely solid, but his relationship to Eastern European problems was less because he was so preoccupied with all that was happening in Western Europe, particularly Germany.

We were so thankful that Jake was aboard during my '56 period when both the Suez Canal and the Hungarian uprising happened all at once. You may remember that Hoover was more or less in charge because Dulles was sick at that time, although of course they consulted him. But without Beam it could have become a bigger disaster - it was a disaster anyway.

I think I said that I was working largely on the Suez problem.

Q: Oh, were you? I didn't remember your having said so.

BLAKE: By that time Ed Freer had taken over EE from Ray Thurston. We formed two task forces in EE. Ed handled the Hungarian revolt and in the earlier stages of it, I was involved too. But then we had to split and I took the Suez side. Our communications with the Russians in that period were very high level. I didn't have anything of importance to do with the Soviet Embassy that I can remember in that period. We were under the threat of nuclear war and not at all sure that it wouldn't break out. This sense of dealing tough with

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the French, and the British, and the Israelis, just at a time when we felt the real enemy was Russian was an extremely delicate matter. I don't have a lot to add.

Q: I think we've got a little bit still on this tape, and let's start off with the very important assignment to Tunisia if you will. You mentioned that generally, but not in very much detail in your previous interview, although you did talk about opening talks with the FLN. I think if you'd give us a little more detail of that part of your activity there it would be useful.

BLAKE: You remember that in '57, and early '58, was the end of the Third Republic in France.

Q: I was, of course, at this time in WE.

BLAKE: There was a series of quite weak French governments, each falling relatively rapidly. Our relations with the French were in some trouble because we were pushing the French hard to get out of Tunisia as fast as possible. They were moving out, but in the course of moving out, the hard line French military people were making a hell of a lot of trouble. They obviously were not at all happy to get out, for example, they were defacing buildings, blowing up barracks and then claiming there had been a gas leak, or something like that. And the Tunisians were quite frightened of what could happen. The Algerian revolt was well launched, and the French generals were not at all happy about leaving Tunisia because of the impact of this withdrawal on Algeria. Bob Murphy had undertaken to extend his good offices, United States' good offices, to help the French and the Tunisians resolve their problems. For several months he shuttled back and forth between Tunis and Paris. I can't really remember now how long, but it seems like several months arranging the details of how disengagement would take place, and how far it would go. Basically it was back to Bizerte, the French naval base in northern Tunisia. In this period there was a famous attack on Sakiet Sidi Youssef by French planes. This was a market town, not too far from the Algerian border where an enormous number of Tunisians and Algerians were coming in for a weekly market. Luckily the attack took place fairly early

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in the morning, before the crowd had really gathered, so not many people were killed, as would have been otherwise. Wow, this was a major crisis and the US took a very strong stand against the French exercising what they considered their legitimate right of pursuit into the country. Relations got very, very tense, as you remember so well, between our two countries. And Bob Murphy showed his mettle in that time. He made no bones about the fact that he was willing to be very tough with the Tunisians. He was not planning to give in to them at all on some of their more extreme demands. He wanted to get the French out of Tunisia as fast as possible, but under conditions that would do the least damage to French psyche and to our relations with them. I remember on one occasion, for example, we felt that he was not being anywhere near tough enough with the French. We wrote a cable to him recommending a tougher policy.

Q: You say "we" - that's in the embassy in Tunis?

BLAKE: Right, we said we didn't think it would be particularly useful for him to come back to Tunis until one or two important details were solved. He came anyway. He was really quite sore about the cable. He felt the cable perhaps would undercut him with Washington. When he got back, he asked Lewis why he had written this cable - Lewis Jones who was our ambassador. And Lewis, for some reason, I've never been sure why, said he didn't write the cable, that I, Bob, Blake, had written the cable. This absolutely infuriated Bob Murphy, and for the rest of that time he would totally ignore the ambassador. This was difficult for me, but rather an amusing position to be in. Murphy didn't hold the cable against me at all. In fact he said he admired my guts.

Q: But did he hold it against the ambassador?

BLAKE: Exactly, and I explained the reasons. I thought that from our position, and seen from Tunis, Murphy could get more out of the French by being a little harder nosed and tougher. Of course, he made the point that from his judgement, his approach was all the traffic could bear in parts. One learned an awful lot from those fine tuned judgements.

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Of course there was always a tendency, which we tried hard to avoid, to have “localitis”. I learned a lot of lessons about not being essentially the Tunisian advocate, but the advocate for the United States causes. I don't think Lewis was really very good at that. He tended to think of his mission as being friendly to the Tunisians.

Q: This was his baby.

BLAKE: Yes, he didn't really think in very big terms. Being on the Soviet desk, I had to think in those broader terms, at least so I thought. At that point we began to have more and more preoccupation with Algeria. This was partly because the Algerians had just moved their political offices in Tunis, this was just before they established a government in exile. As soon as the French had evacuated north to Bizerte, it was much easier for the Algerians to move around the country. And I began to see the military leaders, and people like Bel Kassim Krim.

Q: Now we're talking about the end of '57, more or less.

BLAKE: Yes, and into early '58. I don't remember exactly. With Bob Murphy being in Tunis, I recommended that we establish some kind of contact with the Algerians. He was at first uneasy about it because he felt the French situation was so weak, that something like US talks with the Algerians could cause the government to fall, and this would be very much against our interests. But then the government did fall and De Gaulle came in. It was then that Bob essentially changed his mind. He feared that the whole thrust of De Gaulle's policy towards Algeria would be to hold out as long as he could, he thought he could win the war there. Bob Murphy felt that this was a mistake, just because he didn't think that De Gaulle would succeed in winning the longer term support of the French people, and France's allies, enough to win. So Murphy agreed that it would be good to establish some kind of relationship with the Algerians. His thinking was wonderfully Murphysque. The first reason was to scare the hell out of the French, to take advantage of the French perception that unless the French were able to establish a good relationship with an independent

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Algeria, we might take over. World wide the French always seemed concerned that the US was going to take over French interests; first in Indochina, then in Africa, and then in the Middle East. And Bob perceptively thought that we could take advantage of this, so he instructed me every time I saw anybody in the Algerian side, to go to the French and tell them about it in a general way. Tell enough to whet their appetite, enough to make them concerned; but do so in a very straightforward way; and not to tell them sensitive things, so that if fed back to the Algerians, which we thought they were perfectly capable of doing, the Algerians would think we were breaking confidences. I would then tell the Algerians what the French reaction was, at the same time trying always to avoid in any way posing as an intermediary. The main purpose was not to inform the French, but to scare them.

A second purpose of the talks with the Algerians, was to try to keep them from going too far over towards the Russians. We were very worried about that, and, of course, the Algerians were trying to keep us worried. But Bob felt that my experience with the Soviets would allow me to give them chapter and verse of what it was like to sit down and drink with the devil. And I did a lot of that. I did a lot of general bull sessions with the various members of the Algerian team particularly about the Russians and the French.

The third purpose, of course, was to give the Algerians a clear picture of what we really were up to. I would bar no holds. I would tell them not to expect too much from us because our relations were of great importance. But we felt that they had an authentic reading of what we were thinking about and a chance to ask candid questions.

Fourth, and far from the most important, was essentially to get intelligence on Algerian thinking. Not that we necessarily would believe what they would say. Also an ability to get a sense of how different Algerian leaders fitted in with each other, and the relationship of the political apparatus to the military apparatus was quite valuable. It was a fascinating operation, in some ways the most fascinating thing I ever did in the Foreign Service.

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Q: You got all your instructions on this direct from Bob, did you? Or did they come through the embassy?

BLAKE: I really didn't get much in the way of instructions. I was told to start the talks, and told that I was to be the only one to carry them on. Lewis Jones was, to his rage and consternation, kept out of this.

Q: Did he know you were doing it?

BLAKE: Oh, absolutely. There were no games being played, each time I responded by a Top Secret, NODIS telegram, it was sent to Paris, but I'm not absolutely sure about that. I don't remember. In any case, we weren't playing any games on the thing. We vaguely kept the Tunisians informed. Murphy was absolutely rigid that nobody but myself was to speak to the Algerians. And if I was away on vacation, or home leave, or something, nobody was to do it. One of the things that he was very concerned about, was not to have the CIA move into this dialogue because he believed that the CIA was interested in building an empire, and interested enough in having their sources hear what they(the sources) wanted to hear, that they wouldn't be faithful translators of the kind of toughness he wanted to get through to the Algerians. I learned a lot of lessons - it was self taught - of how to give a very tough message with a smile, and to get away with it. And that, of course, is one of the most important lessons that any of us would ever learn as we went along in our diplomatic careers.

Q: Well now, you were talking to whom? The government in exile, so to speak.

BLAKE: Different people; most often with Mohammad Yazid, who was acting as Foreign Minister. And often with some of his younger people, quite often with Bel Kassim Krim, who acted as Minister of War. Sometimes with army leaders as they would come in from the fighting, I think I was paraded out for the latter to see. They tended to be sharp and rather nasty to me. While the Tunis-based people became friends. I mean as sharp as our

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discussions would be, after the discussion, which very often took place in my house, we'd go downstairs, have dinner, and swap stories about what life was like in Paris.

Q: These people had all been in Paris?

BLAKE: Perhaps. Not some of the military people, or maybe if they had, they hadn't been there very long.

Q: They hadn't been educated there?

BLAKE: The hard liners were the ones that lasted, not the Tunis-based crowd, although Yazid was able to maintain a certain amount of position. The French hated my meetings with the Algerians, and loved it. It gave them something to report on. They detested the idea that this was happening, and they were ambivalent of my telling them about it. I had no problem maintaining good contacts with the French because I was very frank with them, and recognized the tough position that I was putting them in. My French counterpart, the person that I spent most of my time with, was a man who was later General De Gaulle's Chef de Cabinet when I was stationed in Paris. A man named David De La Chevalrie, a very bright individual.

Q: How do you spell Chevalrie?

BLAKE: Chevalrie. A very sound professional man, and a good friend of mine. Of course, we went through tough times because we were pushing the French hard on their withdrawal, pushing them at the time of trouble. I learned how terribly important it was to be very frank, while telling them exactly what the situation was, as much as one could anyway. I recognized their own personal stake in these things and tried to protect them in any way I could.

Q: That's a totally fascinating period. How long did these discussions last?

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BLAKE: All the time I was there, three years. I left Tunis in '60. I suppose the discussions lasted two full years, or a little more, I can't remember exactly.

Q: Do you have any other comments about either people, or activities, or one thing or another, in Tunis, or other functions. This was taking a lot of your time obviously.

BLAKE: I don't suppose it took more than 10% of my time.

Q: You were head of the Political Section?

BLAKE: Yes. This was a very, very fascinating period. I didn't see President Bourguiba more, although from time to time I'd go to see him with the Ambassador. Lewis kept him, as he appropriately should, his substantial contact. What I was trying to do, as far as Tunisia was concerned, was to do two things: this was a new country and the Tunisian Foreign Office was just getting started. I tried to help them come to grips with broader political problems. I spent a lot of time on Soviet affairs, a lot of time on what was happening in other parts of the world, how to factor in what they might do in United Nations affairs. Mongi Slim was their Ambassador at the United Nations. They were hoping to establish themselves as non-aligned leaders. We spent a lot of time on this kind of meat and potatoes problem.

Of course we were very anxious to get a sense of what was happening outside Tunis. I did a lot of traveling. I got to know a lot of the regional governors, spent a lot of time trying to get a sense of what was happening...particularly on the western frontier where, of course, there were millions of Algerian refugees, and plenty of trouble. We tried to gauge what would be the pressures on the Tunisian government from the hard-nosed Algerians who were fundamentalist Moslems, not of the kind we're seeing today in the Middle East; but a tough, austere people who didn't like the rather open, pragmatic, pro-western line which was taken by Bourguiba and his party. This was an absolutely fascinating period, and perhaps in some ways for me, one of the most productive periods of my Foreign Service

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career. It's very typical of a period when you've been in the Foreign Service long enough to know what you're doing, not so high that people want to try to rope you in very much. So you pretty much did what you thought you should do.

Q: You learn a lot, and use it, and you don't in a way commit the government so much.

BLAKE: That's right. I hope middle grade officers today have that latitude.

Q: It's hard for me to know, too, I've been away from the Service for so long.

BLAKE: My son, who spent the first three years of his life in Tunis, is now in the Foreign Service, and is going to be head of the Tunisian desk beginning this summer.

Q: Oh, great. Where has he been so far?

BLAKE: His first job was in Nigeria. He's an economic officer although he's done nothing but political work since now. He had a very interesting tour in Nigeria working on oil problems, and the problems of economic reform. Then he went to Cairo; He did his consular work at first, but the rest of the time he was Frank Wisner's special assistant. So he was right in the center of the action. Then he came back to the Department, and has been senior watch officer in the Operations Center since then.

Q: This is a continuation of the Foreign Service Oral History interview with Ambassador Robert O. Blake. We are now at May 17th, 1990, still at Dacor Bacon House in Washington.

Ambassador Blake, I'm glad you could find the time to get back here, and I think you were just about finished up on the substantive part of your very interesting assignment in Tunisia. I think just before you left you had a change of ambassadors. I believe if I'm right, that Lewis Jones was replaced by Newbold Walmsley. Did that change our operations in any way? Or do you have any particular comment of interest on the different types of the

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two ambassadors? Or the different schools of operation? Walmsley, of course, had had a lot of experience in the UN where you were about to go.

BLAKE: Yes. Newby, of course, came from a basically different background. As you say, he had done work in the United Nations, and then mostly in Europe. This was his first ambassadorial post, I think his only one. He was a solid, sound man who didn't try to change in any way the general thrust of where we were going. I found that he was very interesting to work with. By the time he arrived in Tunis, some of the most difficult days were already past in that most of the French military by now had gotten out of Tunisia - except around Bizerte. Of course, Bizerte became somewhat of a focus somewhat later, but by that time I was in New York at the United Nations. So I don't have much to add about Newby. He was a fine ambassador. Under him the same sort of excellent relations between the United States and Tunisia continued, with the Tunisians very strongly depending upon us, particularly Bourguiba - for defense against the Algerians, the French, and indeed from time to time, the Libyans and the Egyptians. The general sense during all the time I was there, which was Nasser's time, was that the greatest threat to their independence probably was from Egypt. At that time, Nasser was trying to develop a kind of Egyptian hegemony over all of North Africa and as much of the Arab world as he could.

Q: And a little of East Africa, because I was there.

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: That's fascinating. Bourguiba later became a fairly authoritarian type, I believe. Was he already that when you knew him? Or was that something that developed later?

BLAKE: He was the undoubted leader, and his word was certainly law. But he was very much influenced by reason, and very anxious to maintain a strong sense of public support. He went out of his way to consult people, to get a sense of what the nation as a whole wanted. But he was, of course, the kind of person who believed very strongly in exercising positive leadership, and telling his people where he thought the country should go. He

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was still in good health. In time his mistress, Wasila Ben Amar, began to assert strong authority. But when I was there, there wasn't any real sign that he, in fact, wasn't in control of the situation.

Q: Well, you went back and had a year at the Naval War College. Those are always great years, and usually the place to recharge your batteries. I take it that was the case. Do you have anything particular to add?

BLAKE: No, no, nothing special. Of course that kind of assignment adds an additional dimension to your thinking, and your ability to analyze things more deeply. I think that knowing how the military think, and how they act, and indeed knowing a whole series of people who were slated for top level positions in the Armed Forces, is a very positive, wonderful experience. The other part that is really very important, is that if a person is truly conscientious, being required by your peers to justify and articulate what you feel about foreign policy, and against the views of people who aren't necessarily totally of the same opinion, is a very good tempering experience.

Q: I always thought that the Navy too was a particularly valuable group to understand because they, I think, tend to do more strategic thinking than the other two services.

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: Not that they all don't do some. The Air Force thinks the world is one little ball that they can control with a bomb. But the Navy has had historic wars, historic experience.

BLAKE: Yes, I think that's right. A broader geographical sense of what has to be done. A tendency always to, in these periods, to question whether the fight against the Soviet Union was the only important issue. In other words, a closer look at the Middle East, a feeling about the continuing importance of Central America, which at that time had pretty well dropped out of a lot of other people's thinking. On the other hand, the Navy people

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are conservative as a group, compared with the other services. There aren't so many new ideas, perhaps broader thinking, but fewer newer ideas.

Q: In July of '61 you started your nearly 3 year assignment at New York. You went there at a very exciting time, which you've already told us a little about. Particularly the Cuban missile crisis, which I think was exciting for anybody who was anywhere at that time, but particularly with you. You were there with Adlai Stevenson which was particularly interesting, I think, because he was a bit of an ideologue, but a great man, and a very fascinating man. Could you tell us a little about Stevenson, how you started there, how you worked with him? How you got there, perhaps?

BLAKE: I'm not entirely sure how I got there. I was called one day and asked to go down to talk to Stevenson because he was looking for somebody to focus on the Soviet affairs. I had been a pretty good friend of President Kennedy from the time he was a young Congressman. My wife had been a bridesmaid in their wedding, and a life long friend of Mrs. Kennedy. And I got hints that one of the reasons that I was being asked to go there was the White House, or perhaps President Kennedy - I don't know. It never was entirely clear whether the White House wanted somebody in New York who had some personal loyalty to President Kennedy. The only reason I think that, is that I was repeatedly asked by the President, when I would see him socially, how things were going, detailed questions about Stevenson's political loyalty, which, of course, I had no doubt about. I saw nothing (and I said that) that would indicate that Stevenson was doing anything but playing a very straight game.

Q: But a very interesting bit of history.

BLAKE: Yes, and Stevenson was a fine man. My first dealings with him after I went down there at the end of the school year at the War College, was on the Bizerte crisis.

Q: Could you briefly outline what the Bizerte crisis was?

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BLAKE: Yes. I really don't remember all the details, but the problem was that the French soldiers who had retreated as far as their major French naval base in Bizerte, a little bay at the north part of Tunisia, began to make trouble for the Tunisian Government. It was certainly connected with the strong feelings against the Tunisians by the French Army, which was beginning to have a very, very hard time in 1961, in Algeria. Direct negotiations were beginning to get underway to get the French out of Algeria, and there were a lot of internal French politics involved. In any case, there was a siege of the base at Bizerte. The Tunisians were determined to get the French out of Bizerte, and the matter came to the United Nations for a special General Assembly in, I believe, July of 1961 - in any case, it was in the summer.

During the first part of the Special General Assembly, Adlai Stevenson undertook to do most of the negotiations with the French and the Tunisians. To put it in a very blunt way, he was a terrible negotiator. He didn't have any guile. He tended to put the final position up first, which destroyed the whole negotiation process, no longer allowing each side to make the claims that they had won....the accommodations necessary to protect their own position. He recognized this pretty soon, and bowed out, turning negotiations over to Charlie Yost. Charlie Yost, had just come from being career ambassador in Morocco. He'd already been, before that, Ambassador in Laos. He was the epitome of solid Foreign Service competence, a very measured, bright person that people on both sides of a question always enjoyed dealing with. He took over most negotiations for all the time I was there, including part of what happened in New York during the missile crisis.

Q: He was a very able guy. I worked more or less for him in Austria for a while. So I knew him fairly well. You referred in your last interview to the Cuban missile crisis, and there's been a lot written about that. How did you feel it was handled from the UN point of view?

BLAKE: Well, of course, the UN was picking up the pieces, rather than being the major scene of action, providing the framework, and the justification for compromise. But from what we could see up there, things had been handled in Washington really quite well. I

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know that Adlai Stevenson would have liked to have seen the President make a specific and early commitment to pull missiles out of Turkey. The President wasn't willing to do that. There was some dispute. Of course, a lot that I know about the Cuban missile crisis, the internal sides of it, I know from recent reading rather than from what I knew at the time. In that regard, Bobby Kennedy's little book was very revealing. And then there are things that Bob MacNamara has told me. Also some of the really remarkable revelations which came out of the recent meetings between the Russians, and the Cubans, and the Americans who were part of this process. Most the meetings took place - I believe last summer in Moscow. Of course, one has to be careful to distinguish between what one knows, and what one's read; it's not always easy. We felt, at the time, that we were being pretty well informed of what was going on. We didn't feel we were being cut out, but it was very clear that the President didn't want to give Adlai either all the credit, or all the responsibility for what was happening in New York. He had assigned other people to share with Adlai, for example an outstanding Republican - John McCloy. He was given the responsibility by the President to do most of the negotiations in New York with Mikoyan. By that time, of course, the Soviet ships had pulled back and the missiles were on their way out, or it had been agreed that they were out, I'm not sure physically whether they were. The question was what kind of cover agreements would make possible a neat kind of withdrawal. And behind it all was strong resistance by the Cubans to the fact that the Russians were agreeing to all kinds of things about Cuba that they didn't like at all. We found very quickly that Mikoyan was having to pull back pretty fast from some of the things that he had agreed to. I don't honestly remember a lot of the details of that.

Q: Most of it by this time is on the record, but I think the impressions of how you remember it... and in a sense the UN was filling the public - I mean the US-UN was filling a public relations kind of role of bringing some of these things out into the open.

BLAKE: That's right. It was a very exciting time and, of course, one of our problems was to figure out how much we should tell our friends in other UN missions. People who were just

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a little bit farther away from the action, but still friendly, including Ambassadors in the non-aligned group.

Q: Later on I want to ask you how that whole process works after we get through the last... now, you mentioned at one point that you were handling the Hungarian problem which interests me because I was in Hungary during part of this time. And as a matter of fact, embarrassed myself terribly by being roped in to seeing the Foreign Minister off to the UN meeting, and that wasn't a very smart thing of me to do, but I didn't suffer from it. But I wondered if there were any sidelines of Hungary in the UN at that time?

BLAKE: There was a lot of talk, but not much negotiation.

Q: We still weren't ready to do any business on it.

BLAKE: It was interesting; that was the time also that there was a questioning, a wondering, if it would be appropriate, or advantageous to reintroduce the Berlin question. So Hungary and Berlin were the major points of direct contact at the UN between ourselves and the Russians at that time. Actually, in the end, despite the fact that some people up in New York would have liked to have seen Berlin brought in, we felt, as did the Germans - the Germans who by this time were at the United Nations - that this wasn't to our advantage. And we tried to some extent to play on the Hungarian problem... but it was essentially dead diplomacy. There wasn't anything really happening. There were constant little explorations, but we didn't get much in the way of new information, or insights on the problem.

Q: What was your actual title, or organizational function there?

BLAKE: Of course, they are different from those in Embassies. During the period of the General Assembly, I was the Executive Officer of the US Delegation Special Political Committee which control all the non-disarmament, non-nuclear political questions, this included Hungary. It included Alto Adige, involving the Italians, the Austrians, and a vast

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number of problems from Kashmir to, most important and sensitive, the Middle Eastern problems.

Q: And most insoluble.

BLAKE: Yes. During the rest of the year I was in charge of everything to do with the Middle East, everything to do with Africa except the Congo.

Q: When the UN was technically fighting a war there.

BLAKE: That's right. We had one man working full time on the Congo. I negotiated oversight of everything to do with the Soviets. So it was a big job and I had two or three people working for me. It was a very interesting time. My colleague on the British side was the present ambassador here, Anthony Ackland. Another thing I did; I was the deputy representative on a group called, first, the Committee of Eighteen, and then the Committee of Twenty-One, this was the decolonialization committee.

Q: That word sounds very

BLAKE: Yes. I don't remember whether I told about that in my previous interview or not.

Q: No, I don't think you did.

BLAKE: It was at the period, of course, when the easy cases of decolonialization were largely finished, and a lot of the hard ones were beginning to come up. For example, we went to Africa as a group and held hearings first in Morocco, then in Addis Ababa, then in Nairobi, and then in Dar es Salaam. And I visited Zanzibar as part of that trip. This was a committee made up of mostly representatives from the non-aligned countries, the Soviets, ourselves, the British, quite an interesting group. Everybody was watching what the United States said and did. As a matter of fact, the Soviet representative was a good friend of mine. He always insisted on traveling in the same plane, and if possible, in the same car

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with me, as he was quite certain that the CIA or somebody was going to blow up the other airplane.

Q: At that time we already had the system of having Congressional delegations up to the UN.

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: Do you remember any of those people that you dealt with particularly? Was there anybody outstanding that you can think of from the Congressional group? Those are sometimes useful contacts to have.

BLAKE: I knew quite a few of them. One person I worked very closely with, who is now dead, was Representative Edna McKelly.

Q: I was a close associate of Edna just for a while.

BLAKE: She was a remarkable woman.

Q: Yes, she was a little bit of an unguided missile, but she would take advice and she really poured out enthusiasm, particularly as she learned.

BLAKE: One year she represented the United States on the special political committee. Another person that I had a lot of very close ties with was Congressman Sid Yates, who is now one of the top men in the Appropriations Committee. Sid was not at the US Mission as a representative of the Congress, but rather as a political appointee. He had run against Senator Dirksen for the Senate and had been defeated. And he was given a political appointment as one of the five ambassadors on the delegation. After two years he was reelected to the House, and is there today.

Q: He was a pretty good man.

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BLAKE: A very solid person. He was the top US representative for two years on the Decolonialization Committee too. I also saw Senator Chuck Percy a lot up there.

Q: Not having worked at the UN on the Congo, you were then sent to the Congo.

BLAKE: To my great surprise.

Q: How did this come about? How did you get there? Was there anything interesting about your assignment?

BLAKE: Not as far as I know. I'd been in New York three years, and three General Assemblies. In time that becomes a very wearing kind of an assignment, three years is normally how long people like to stay. After two years I started looking around and was offered this job as DCM in the Congo to Ambassador Mac Godley. I had not known Mac before, but he was a friend of all my friends. Actually I had, but I'd just barely met him. I met him on the way back from East Africa when I'd been on that decolonialization trip. At that time he was DCM in the Congo. Also the fact that at the time my brother-in-law was on the Congo desk - Charlie Whitehouse - probably didn't hurt. Aside from him I really didn't know the people on the Congo desk. It was headed by Frank Carlucci.

Q: Oh, yes, who had been in Leopoldville, hadn't he?

BLAKE: Yes, he'd been in Leopoldville as a political officer, and had come back to the Department as one of the junior officers on the Congo desk. While we were in Leopoldville it suddenly became known as Kinshasa. Service there was, of course, one of my most fascinating experiences in the Foreign Service. It was a joy working with Godley. He and I were in some ways different, but we tended to complement each other. He was an absolute genius in the way he was able to handle people. He was very good in putting across a tough message, and making people accept it, and like it. He was always considered as sort of the Viceroy because he'd had such an important role through the years in various posts, not without some resentment on the part of the Congolese. But he

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was a strong, positive figure, who said what he believed. What I added to it, I think, was a different kind of analysis, a more analytical approach to what was happening.

Q: Mac is an activist if nothing else.

BLAKE: That's right.

Q: And a very successful one.

BLAKE: He and I were very close, are very close, to this day. I have the highest regard for him, and we couldn't have been a closer team.

Q: Was his Viceroyism what led to him being PNGed later on? Can you give some background on that?

BLAKE: I wasn't in Kinshasa when he was declared a PNG. I had gone on home leave in the summer of '66 after I'd been there over two years. We'd come in March, 1964 and we postponed our home leave until the summer because of school vacations. I thought I was coming back to Kinshasa after leave, but after I got back to the States I was told that I was being shifted to Saigon to take Phil Habib's position as Chief of the Political Section. So we made the necessary arrangements to have our things shipped from Kinshasa. Then in the middle of the summer- even before my home leave was up - I got word that I had to get back to Kinshasa in a hurry because the chief of the CIA station, Larry Devlin, had been told by President Mobutu that he no longer was going to put up with Godley. Mac had a lot of tough messages to deliver to Mobutu. By this time Mobutu had thrown out Moise Tshombe and taken over himself. He had begun to be quite autocratic. The finances of the country were in a mess, and we had been beginning to put some tough conditions if he wanted to keep on having our support. I guess his being kicked out comes under the category of killing the messenger. There was also some lingering bad feeling between Mobutu and Godley from the days when Mac had been DCM. At that time he had been the principal person in the negotiations which resulted in the election of Aboula Abdulla as

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Prime Minister of the Congo. It had always seemed to everybody that the United States or probably Godley, had personally chosen Aboula over Mobutu and had pushed the negotiations in this direction. I don't think Mobutu ever forgave Godley for this.

Q: There was some truth in it I take it, probably. Not necessarily Godley himself.

BLAKE: That's right, it was a Washington decision to go that way. After all, at that time Mobutu was a fairly young army officer. He had just begun to exert his primacy within the ANC - the national army, Congolese National Army. He certainly wasn't the kind of a consensus figure that the United States had been looking for. Of course, I was not a part of those negotiations, and I'm not really sure what happened.

Q: It is an interesting thing. I'm skipping over some of the things you did there because you did cover them in your last account, and I think we can blanket that into a collective record. When you came back and took over you were relatively clean because you'd left for a while, and also you'd always been the Mr. Good Guy, so to speak.

BLAKE: Maybe. I had very good relations with Mobutu, and I'd been Charg# a lot but, there wasn't a bit of difference between what I thought and what Mac thought. Perhaps there was a perception on Mobutu's part that he could get more out of me than he could get out of Mac. That's often the way those kind of people think.

Q: How long were you in charge before the new Ambassador, Bob McBride came?

BLAKE: I was Charg# almost a year. In fact they didn't even name an ambassador until just before I left. Part of it the reason was to leave Mobutu simmering in his discontent. Also, I guess the Department was sufficiently satisfied with the way I was performing. Also, I had gotten very, very involved in the negotiations around the nationalization of the Union Miners. I can't remember whether I discussed that or not.

Q: No, you did not.

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BLAKE: This was a very interesting period, Mobutu was beginning to feel his oats enough that he decided to nationalize the Union Miners, which is the great mining company in the eastern part of the country, the Katanga.

Q: Which was Belgian.

BLAKE: Yes, it was Belgian, but it isn't anymore. It was my feeling that if Mobutu nationalized one company, the whole Congo would fall apart and the Belgian administrators would pull out. There were no Congolese engineers. There were no Congolese business people capable of taking on this incredibly sophisticated job. So we, while the negotiations were supposedly going on only between the Belgians and the Congolese, were in fact a major part of it. The Belgians were never strong enough to, or determined enough, to really protect their own interests. They always turned to us for help.

Q: Part of the indication of that is the speed they got out of there. I mean the speed the government got out.

BLAKE: Yes, absolutely. Belgium is after all a tiny little country. We played a very major role in convincing Mobutu that while he might save face by "nationalizing" the Union Miners and making it a Congolese company, assuring that he had a certain amount of control, nevertheless it was in his interest, and certainly our interest, to continue the flow of copper, and some of the other metals from that area, and to avoid anything which basically might be interpreted as anti-European, or anti-white. We were able to help the Belgians and the Congolese talk the thing through. I was able to use to advantage Morris Tempelsman, who at that time was a prosperous young diamond merchant. He has become a somewhat shadowy figure since, partly as a frequent date of Jackie Onassis.

Q: Did you introduce them?

BLAKE: We had interesting dealings with Ted Sorensen, who came out as the lawyer for some of the American Union Miner share holders. I also had fascinating contact with

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some of the South Africans who came to Kinshasa to see if they could help straighten the situation out, and of course, to protect their own interests. It was a very heady, very interesting period.

I'd like to go back and read some of the dispatches of all that period. So much of the negotiating was detailed. The Department was very good about giving me a lot of freedom of action. They let me say what I thought should be done, and then do it. I was given a lot of authority. And when that negotiation was largely completed, Bob McBride came to Kinshasa. I stayed with him for about a month, until he felt that he understood this complicated situation. He had not worked on Congolese affairs before.

So then I left. Unfortunately, I didn't have any real onward assignment because it was not at all clear when I would be able to leave. Of course it's always sticky for a new ambassador to have somebody around too long who knows the president better than he does. I felt also that I'd been there almost four years, and that was a long time. I was ready to go.

Q: I know what you mean. So you did get another - either a rest, or recuperation in a sense which you certainly deserved after two very, very rugged jobs. I don't know what the Senior Seminar was, it was a good year.

BLAKE: Lewis Jones was head of it then, which was lots of fun.

Q: Well, he was a fellow with considerable imagination.

BLAKE: Absolutely, he was very, very imaginative during the year. We did a lot of traveling all over the country. Now 1967 was the year that all things environmental were beginning to come up. The things I saw and the experiences that I had, certainly convinced me that I wanted to spend a good part of my life - God willing - working on environmental problems. So it was a very, very fortuitous time to get to know about the environment, to get to know the people involved. But then deeper than that, I had a chance to observe closely events in

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this incredible period the late '60s, the anti-war movement, the feminist movement, the civil rights movement, a time when huge cultural shifts were taking place in the US, the biggest that had taken place in my lifetime.

Q: Well, the late '60s were the most exciting time.

BLAKE: And going around the country talking to everybody, labor, business, students. This was truly a wonderful experience, just the right time to do it.

Q: Then you renewed your connection with the Kennedy family.

BLAKE: Not really. Of course, President Kennedy was dead. In about, I would think, February, I don't know for sure, but fairly early I was told that my next assignment would be to go to Vietnam again - the third time.

Q: That you'd be assigned to that country?

BLAKE: Yes, this time to the DEPCORDS they called it. Deputy Commander for the Operations in the Four Corps down in the Delta, to take the place of some incredible fellow who they've just been writing a book about. So I started getting ready. I must say that I didn't particularly look forward to that assignment because I had not had a lot of experience...except in my War College days with the Armed Services. I knew that it was a very tough assignment to sort of second guess the military in all matter of things. But on the other hand, this is where the action was and I made absolutely no attempt to get out of this assignment. In fact, I was going to school, beginning to try to learn some Vietnamese; beginning to get myself ready; attending many seminars on a part-time basis, and language and area studies at the Foreign Service Institute on Vietnam. I joined in part time and learned a lot in that period. Then out of the blue I was told at a party by Bill Macomber, who was the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration, that I was being considered for the job of DCM in Paris. Of course, that was a most exciting prospect. As I found out more and more, I learned that the new ambassador, Sargent Shriver, simply

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couldn't abide Woody Wallner, who was the DCM. Woody was a much older guy. There obviously was a strong personality clash.

Q: Yes. Woody was a character. A very able guy but...

BLAKE: He knew more about France than I would ever know, and knew everybody in Paris. But he was a character. He simply didn't fit in to the way Shriver wanted to have his embassy seen, and operated. I think the reason I was suggested to Shriver, I'd never met Shriver before, was that during the time I had been at the Senior Seminar, I had organized a program for the Foreign Service to become involved with the problems of community development with the Black people here in Washington. This was a time when all kinds of new organizations were coming up, and it was a time when it was very clear that some of these organizations offering to help the Black community to get themselves reestablished after the April 1968 riots, they were getting the funds to do this.

Q: And this was the decolonialization, you'd work on America's last colony.

BLAKE: I was very sensitive to the feelings of the Black people, it was important not to have a bunch of white people coming in and trying to tell the Black community how to run their affairs. We organized a quite interesting kind of program, where we maybe got 50-60 Foreign Service officers working in all kinds of different places in quiet advisory ways, sometimes helping some with fund-raising. I think probably the importance of that particular exercise was not in what we were able to do, rather it was what we learned about the Black community, and that we were able to get a sense of the problems.

In any case, somehow Shriver heard about this work, and asked me if I'd like to come to Paris. And, of course, I said, "Sure."

Q: Very few people have ever turned that job down.

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BLAKE: That's right. Of course, Woody was furious. He immediately got in touch with Chip Bohlen who had just been ambassador there. Chip called me in and sort of read the riot act to me about all this. I knew Chip very well because I'd been head of Soviet affairs when he was ambassador to the Soviet Union, and we were good friends. I said, "What do you expect? Shriver has the right to have the person he wants as DCM. Do you think I ought to turn it down?" He said, "No, of course not, but I resent the fact that somebody as good as Wallner would be given the gate." Indeed, that's what it was. And it wasn't very pleasant. Woody tried to hold on. At that time there was some feeling that perhaps Shriver might be nominated for Vice President. We actually got there, at Sarge's request, in August. By now Woody had been sent off to be an inspector, but his wife wouldn't give up the DCM house.

Q: I was in one of those snares once, and it was very difficult. This was when?

BLAKE: '68.

Q: Before the election?

BLAKE: Yes, late summer and early fall. Until the Democratic convention was over, it wasn't absolutely certain that Shriver would continue, although in retrospect, he never thought he had a good chance to be named Vice President.

Q: Was there some kind of deal with the Republican Party to keep him on there? I mean, was it already known at that time? Obviously...

BLAKE: No, we didn't know for sure. Of course, the election was in November, and right after the election Nixon asked Shriver to stay on. He said, "Sure." And so, of course, he stayed on until the spring of '70. He left because he wanted to explore the possibility of being elected governor of Maryland.

Q: Which was a fiasco.

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BLAKE: That's right.

Q: But still, that's quite a period. Every political ambassador is a little... every ambassador is different. This was a very interesting guy. How did you get along?

BLAKE: We got along marvelously well. My way of dealing with him, and with his charming wife, was to never say “no.” Say “yes” to everything, and not use that additional word “but,” but to let things work out. He was full of ideas. One of the things that had bothered him about some Foreign Service officers, was that they always said “no” to him. No, you can't do this. No, you can't do that. No, you can't do something else. That was not the way to work with him. Some people are that way. His concept of what he did best, was correct. He was a magnificent salesman. And he was all the time in some kind of a dramatic way, selling US interest, and demonstrated his own interest. He traveled in France extensively. Before he went on a trip, there would be very, very strenuous preparations. Everything would be worked out in scenarios, and the press would be given a place. There were always dramatic elements. I very seldom was on the trips with him because...

Q: Somebody had to run the shop.

BLAKE: For example, a Shriver trip to Marseille. He arranged to go to the fish market in the early morning when they have the great auctions. It's one of those great sights of France, he arranged to be interviewed by the French press talking with the fish mongers and their ladies. He even helped pull the nets in.

Q: Was his French good by this time?

BLAKE: His French was fairly fluent, and perfectly atrocious, but that didn't matter. Not too long before he left, “Paris Match” did a public survey of the most popular people in France, and he was one of the top ten. He was just incredibly effective at public diplomacy. It was

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a very, very active period of U.S.-French diplomacy. There was a big turn around in official French attitudes with the United States.

Q: This was President Pompidou by this time?

BLAKE: No, it was De Gaulle still, although De Gaulle left office while I was there. There were a series of things that contributed to better relations. I'm not sure whether I've talked about this in the previous interview, or not. Let me suggest several reasons. First, was the Soviet reoccupation of Czechoslovakia which brought De Gaulle to recognize that his idea of playing a role between the United States and the Soviet Union, and somehow bringing Eastern Europe back into more of a western context, simply wasn't going to work.

And then after that very quickly there was a bad financial crisis in France when people started taking all the gold they could find and smuggling it out of the country. The franc was falling like crazy. President Johnson offered to provide the necessary gold to back up the French; it worked and the Franc stabilized. And that had a very, very big and happy impact on US-French relations.

Then Nixon came to Paris. Nixon is a very special kind of a man. He is a person I had very interesting connections with because we come from the same town in California. My father had been his first campaign treasurer. Nixon absolutely, intellectually and otherwise, charmed De Gaulle out of the trees.

Q: I traveled with him once, so I got a little... and he was certainly a very powerful guy on foreign policy.

BLAKE: Certainly, in my view, the best President we've had on foreign affairs. Tough, well informed, a strategic thinker.

Q: He listened before he made up his mind.

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BLAKE: And listened again, and listened again. I saw him working with De Gaulle in several meetings. There were some one on one meetings that none of us sat in on, only De Gaulle, and Nixon, and General Dick Walters, our Military Attach# who was the translator. It was in those meetings that as early as early '69 - that Nixon told De Gaulle that he was planning to reopen relations with China if a deal could be worked out. He asked for De Gaulle's advice and support. Of course, this was a policy which De Gaulle had argued for a long time, and he was very flattered. Also, at that time, Nixon talked with De Gaulle about what kind of a role the French might be able to play in bringing the Vietnam War to a close. Those were very, very important talks. It was in that time also that a number of practical measures were agreed on to bring the French army back into a better working relation with NATO, although they didn't rejoin NATO, and haven't. Things like pipelines agreements, movement of military supplies, maneuvers, renewed exchanges of military information, were set in place.

Q: Who besides De Gaulle did you deal with? You probably didn't deal directly with De Gaulle.

BLAKE: No, I never dealt directly with De Gaulle.

Q: Who was Secretary General, for instance, at the Foreign Office? You probably dealt with him.

BLAKE: Yes, that's right. Jacques Beaumarchais. I dealt with him all the time. Another person I dealt very closely with was, De Gaulle's Chef de Cabinet, a man named Xavier De La Chevalrie. We'd been together in Tunis. He's the man I used to go to tell about all my conversations with the Algerians. I didn't see him regularly, but I would see him every few weeks, and when I did it was on something quite important which we wanted to bring to De Gaulle's personal attention. We didn't abuse that chance. We did most of our work through the Foreign Office, and that was the right way to do it. And then, of course, in a post like Paris one spends a lot of time getting to know, and work with all the political

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leaders of all the parties, except the communists. For example, I got to know Mitterrand pretty well.

Q: Enough to know him.

BLAKE: Yes. He was, at that time, not a socialist. He was the representative in the Parliament of just a small Catholic left-wing party. It was a small part of the coalition, working with the socialists usually, but not always. And, of course, one of the charming people that I had a lot to do with was not the mayor of Paris at that time, Jacques Chirac and the Prime Minister. Jacques Chirac, he was a junior minister at that time, in agriculture, then in treasury, as I recall. He used to come over to the American embassy because he liked American hamburgers.

Q: Hamburgers?

BLAKE: That's right. He had spent two summers in the United States and spoke pretty good English. One summer when he was a university student, he worked in Howard Johnsons. In the second year he worked as a sort of... as he described it, as a sort of gigolo, taking rich old women around the United States in their cars, and showing them a good time. He was a good friend of ours. We met a lot of nice people. Viscount Giscard D'Estaing. We had very wide contacts with French society, I don't just mean French political society, but French business and scientific people, were very well received. We went someplace almost every weekend. By the time I left there, I was very tired because we literally had breakfast, lunch, dinner, and two cocktail parties a day, usually changing clothes in the black tie in a striptease in our car in the middle of Paris traffic.

Q: About twice as much and bad as it was in Rome, which is the only place I've ever been exposed to that level of activity. Well, Ambassador Shriver left, and an unfortunate man came as Ambassador.

BLAKE: Dick Watson.

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Q: ...Ambassador Watson came, which was a very sad interlude.

BLAKE: I wasn't there that long with him. I was saved from that. What happened was, not very long after he arrived (there was about a two month delay before he came), his sister died and he went home because they had some important family business to straighten out. That took some time. Then he came back and I went on home leave. Then he went on home leave, so I really didn't see him very much. When he came back he announced to me that he'd been told by the White House to get rid of me because I was a card carrying Democrat. The different reason was that I had served with Shriver, and Stevenson. The person behind it apparently was John Lehman, who was in the political office of the White House.

Q: The later Secretary of the Navy.

BLAKE: Of course, there was nothing to that charge Watson wasn't very gracious about. He said we had six days to get out of town which, when you have a conspicuous life, is not so easy. So I talked with Bill Macomber in Washington, and he said, "There's nothing much we can do about it. The White House says that's the way they want it." I said, "Does the President know?" He said, "I've absolutely no way to know, and no way to really find out."

Q: They surrounded the President so much, there just was no contact.

BLAKE: I said, "Does the Secretary know about this?" And he said, "He does, and he thinks the thing to do is for you to leave." He said to give you any ambassadorial job that's open. Get you right on to an ambassadorial job. He gave me a choice of several posts. The ones opened up were very frankly not very interesting. I picked Mali because all the problems of the great drought in Mali were beginning to come up, and that was the one also that Macomber thought I should take. There were others like Paraguay. The only one I remember.

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Q: Mali at least was a Francophone country even though the atmosphere was a little different than Paris.

BLAKE: This move was deeply distressing, I don't mind saying. Maybe even more for my wife than for myself, but I felt that you roll with the punch, that politics are a part of the picture when you get to the senior level. There's just no way around it.

Q: It's not supposed to be, but there it is.

BLAKE: That's right. In our short time together, I also had had a couple of occasions where being with Dick Watson had been quite uncomfortable. He had never once criticized me, or turned on me, but I'd seen him do it to other people. There was one man in the embassy, whose name I won't repeat, who was a recovered alcoholic. Watson kept trying to get him to drink, and do things like saying, "You're a terrible coward. Come on, have a drink with me." It was really sort of sick. My friends wouldn't do it. The next day in a meeting he was unforgivably rude and illogical in attacking this man's work. I said to Watson in front of other people, that there was no point in doing this kind of thing. In as nice a way as I could, I bawled him out and he'd taken off. So that was a sign that things could get a lot worse.

Q: He was obviously a sick man.

BLAKE: He wasn't as sick then as he was later. Most of the time he could be quite charming, but he went down hill apparently under tension. When I left, of course he hadn't been in Paris very much, or very long.

Q: Paris, and you had picked Bamako. That must have been quite a change, but a fascinating country, I gather from having talked to you.

BLAKE: Probably the most interesting of all the African countries. The valley of the historic Niger River Valley, ancient civilizations, wonderful people.

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Q: It really has a history compared to a lot of other places, at least more of it is written.

BLAKE: That's right, and very, very interesting people. A very poor country. They had a strong history of being anti-French because they were the enemy that the French had been fighting when Franco took over West Africa. That had translated itself into modern times into a - during the time of Modibo Kena - very pro-communist in outlook. By the time we got there, Modibo Kena had been thrown out. The army had taken over, and while there was a general leftist metaphor being used, it really didn't amount to that much. U.S. interests were not that enormous there. Our interests were in seeing that the place prosper, and begin to be able to solve some of its own problems.

Q: Well, that was enough of a challenge for anybody I would think.

BLAKE: I spent most of my time working on and looking at the AID program. It was a sizeable AID program, trying to help the country get itself established in various ways. Also I spent a lot of largely fruitless time trying to talk the Malians into setting up a family planning program. We finally succeeded in getting them to let in a small group from Planned Parenthood Canada to establish a fertility clinic for women, to show how they could have babies. The idea was that, once they had a family, they would then be in the right mood to limit the number of children. So it was really a very big challenge.

The politics of the country were, as far as I was concerned, of very little importance, particularly the internal politics. I made a rule that nobody in our embassy - a small embassy - was to talk about internal politics with Malian officials. I simply didn't want us to get involved in something which was, as in any country, very Machiavellian and of no real importance to us. I did the talking about politics, when I did, with the President of the country directly, with everything above board so he'd know what the story was. There was not very much emphasis on politics. That was a good decision on my part. That left other people to work on other kinds of relations with the Malians.

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Q: Mostly economic?

BLAKE: Yes, economic or scientific. For example, I got the Space Administration to establish a small program for using Landsat imagery, to look for water in this vast desert where finding water is very important. We started a very small space program which was quite productive for the Malians.

Q: Did it do anything to make a dent in the drought and starvation situation there?

BLAKE: No.

Q: Was there any significant Marxist, or pseudo-Marxist, feeling there? Or was it purely an indigenous form of socialism?

BLAKE: There was a lot of Marxist sentiment. This was a fairly early time, of course, before it became as apparent that things were going down hill in all the communist countries. One reason was that so many of the bright people had gone to Paris. They had been very well treated by left-wing people in France and they came back with that kind of baggage. I don't know if I said this before, but we found that the Malians who were the easiest to work with were the ones who had been to the Soviet Union.

Q: They know the facts about life in the Soviet Union.

BLAKE: Yes. They come back with a good technical education as a whole, not too high tech, but also come back with a very, very strong feeling against the Russians, and a very low appreciation of the workings of the Soviet system. Russians are simply terrible with people of color. And the Africans were definitely discriminated against. They would get beat up when they would try to take out local girls, and things like that. For most of them it had been quite an unpleasant experience.

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Q: It's nice to know that somebody else is even worse than we are, although I think we've learned an awful lot on this sort of thing.

BLAKE: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, the Malians who went to the States liked it very much. The problem was that people didn't want to come home. I was fairly determined that we weren't going to be a source of major brain drain, so when people went to the States, many for advanced degrees, we would insist that they leave their families behind. Otherwise they never came back. That made for a lot of lonely people, there's no question about that, but they did come back. From everybody's point of view it was a better thing to do.

Q: Did you have a Peace Corps operation?

BLAKE: Yes.

Q: What did they do? Teach English, or teach something else?

BLAKE: I don't remember any English teaching. There was a lot of poultry raising, for example. And there was welding, we had a whole series of projects to do mostly with agriculture.

Q: What was your feeling there about the value of the AID program? Of course, it's of value to the participants in it. We all know that. I mean it's of great value. Did you feel it was a constructive part of our program?

BLAKE: We tried very hard. We had some programs that worked pretty well. We tried to keep it simple, and tried to avoid heavy input of equipment that couldn't be maintained. For example, the poultry program was a very successful program all over the country. That was a joint Peace Corps-AID program. We tried some things that didn't work. For example, one of the big problems has always been; how to get Malian cattle from the great plains up

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in the Niger River Valley all the way down to the coast. The way it had always been done was to march them on foot.

Q: There they lost half their weight on the way.

BLAKE: That's right, just eating what they could find as they went along. So they'd arrive skin and bones and of not very much value. We tried to help them set up something that they wanted which was to build some cattle feeding stations, watering stations, and places where the cattle could be loaded onto trucks. We spent a certain amount of money although we didn't get that far into it, and it failed. The reason it failed is that although the herdsmen, who are all Fulani, had said that they would sell cattle, when push came to shove, they wouldn't sell very many on a regular basis. For example, they would sell cattle with the evil eye. They'd sell cattle who kicked over fences, cattle that got too old. But so much of their wealth, and their prestige, is represented by how many head of cattle they have, that you simply wouldn't assure a constant enough flow to make possible all the things that had to be done to put a system in. I learned an awful lot out of that failure.

Q: I think until you've actually been out and seen some of these things on the ground, you don't realize what the problem is.

BLAKE: That's right. We'd had a sociologist out there working with the Fulani for a long time. He spent almost a year talking to the Fulani; he was absolutely convinced that they would sell their cattle. But they wouldn't.

Q: The most valuable guy I had on my AID staff was a young anthropologist who really made a serious study of what made them tick psychologically, and socially. He saved us a lot of money.

BLAKE: Absolutely important. We had limited success. The problem was really, that the gains that were made were wiped out by population growth. Mali never got ahead of the curve.

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Q: What is the population of Mali roughly? Or what was it in those days?

BLAKE: At that time it was over 20 million.

Q: Oh, really? I had no idea it was that large. So that took a lot of people. How about the Peace Corps in terms of relations with the population, and the US image?

BLAKE: Very good. Our only big problem with the Peace Corps was that they tried something which I recommended against, but they did it anyway. They brought a lot of old people over there. I shouldn't say a lot. I think maybe ten. And, of that, several of them died. They couldn't take the heat, and the kind of primitive living that we had there. The Peace Corps did phase the old folks properly out. I was never against the idea of older people in the Peace Corps. I think that's great, but don't put them in a place where the pressures of living, and the climate, are going to be such that they can't handle it.

Q: Well, I personally felt the Peace Corps was one of my most useful tools, a little earlier on, in the other side of the continent, but some people didn't. That's interesting.

BLAKE: I agree with you. I won't say, the most useful, in a sense because they tended to be people who were out in the country away from the center of where the most activity was.

Q: I didn't find them useful so much in economic terms, or programs terms, as in human relations and that sort of thing, that's what I had in mind.

BLAKE: We lost several people from sickness there. It's a tough country health wise. People drinking contaminated water, then getting malaria, or some kind of flu. The strongest of them will fall. The Peace Corps tries hard to teach young people that they're not invulnerable in these tropical climates. We didn't have a doctor.

Q: You didn't have a doctor? Oh, we did, I must say.

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BLAKE: We had few doctors in the country, except the witch doctors. No Western doctors. We did have a good nurse. She probably could have done anything, even surgery. We had one serious case when the wife of the head of the Peace Corps, who was pregnant, started bleeding profusely and then had a miscarriage - a serious one. I was told by the nurse that if we didn't get someone to help this woman, her life was in danger. I called Frankfurt, the Air Force there on the radio, and they had a plane down there in three hours with an operating theater. They immediately did what they had to stabilize her. They had an air conditioned plane with an operating theater and then hauled her away to Frankfurt and saved her life.

Q: That sounds like it gives you a lot of support through your staff.

BLAKE: It sure does.

Q: You mentioned in your previous conversation that your wife had to teach the children. How old were they at the time?

BLAKE: Just before going into high school.

Q: Did it work all right?

BLAKE: Yes. Like you, Tully, we always took the position that the kids were going to get a lot more out of their life in these places than just school. I'd haul them all over the country with me on trips. Once I took one of my sons to Abidjan when I went down for consultation of some kind. Those are the things that they remember, learning about how Africans live. They did fine with the Calvers course, but that's not what they really learned.

Q: But still, you do have the frightful thing of keeping them up in school, and keeping on with their education - their formal education.

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BLAKE: They all did very well, and had no reentry problems when they came back to American schools.

Q: That's great. That proves you paid some attention to them, which by the way you can do in the Foreign Service better than you can if you're stuck in the Department.

BLAKE: I think so too, absolutely.

Q: How about the quality of leadership in Mali? Were the people being intelligent, shrewd?

BLAKE: The whole leadership was very intelligent, very shrewd, very high class people, not highly educated. Most of the people at the top level in the government were Army officers. They were conscientious, somewhat limited in their grasp of international economics, and so forth, but they as a whole handled the problems of their country very well. Mali is a country which had the potential for a lot of problems among tribes, and groups. Fortunately that was very muted. Not only muted because it was kept down by force, which as a whole I don't think it was, but because people were relatively satisfied with what was happening. It was a country where people didn't have very high expectations, never had. The French never put much money into Mali, or spoiled them in any way.

Q: And they didn't have an over-educated class... people would be discontent.

BLAKE: No. The real problem was that they never, never got on top of their population growth, and they haven't yet. These men considered themselves modern, advanced thinkers, neo-Marxists, which didn't go very deeply as I said. On the other hand they were reactionary, male, chauvinists in the way their society had always been. I'm not criticizing them, but the idea of any kind of women's lib, or population programs, did not go over at all well.

Q: Is Mali largely Muslim?

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BLAKE: I suppose it's a total of many cultural elements, but that's just the way it was.

Q: No, what I mean is, is the population largely Muslim?

BLAKE: Yes, yes.

Q: Are there any final thoughts on Mali, or should we get back to...

BLAKE: I don't think so. It was a very, very instructive experience for me. I learned a lot. Dave Newsom, who was Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, asked me if I would like to go on another African post, and I told him "no."

Q: You had a little more support possibly in the Congo.

BLAKE: Oh, sure. That was a very different situation. But I thought it was time for us to get out of Africa. My wife felt definitely that she'd had enough. So we decided... it's always a little risky to turn down another African embassy. They were going to send us to the Ivory Coast, which is really very nice. Or if I wanted, to Ghana. Both nice enough posts, but we wanted to get back to Washington. Two of our kids were in school in the States, so I actually asked them to send me back after I'd been there three years. There was a certain amount of resentment in the Department to that.

Q: Well, the African Bureau had a lot of posts, and I frankly did the same thing, so I know.

BLAKE: Sure. A lot of us did. When I got back to Washington and essentially had to hunt out my own job. I went in and talked to Dave Popper, who was Assistant Secretary for International Organizations. His Deputy, Martin Hillenbrand, was about to go off... and talked Popper into taking me on as his principal deputy in IO. Dave left just about that time to go to Chile, and Bill Buffum came in, Bill and I got along marvelously. So I had those several years in that job. They proved to be fascinating years, in part because Henry Kissinger came in as Secretary just at that time. Bill was high on Kissinger's list as an able

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Foreign Service officer, and he was always being taken away for special assignments. For example, he spent months - I don't know how many, but I think it was six months - on Cyprus negotiations, in Cyprus, and in Turkey, back and forth. Kissinger succeeded Cy Vance, of course. So I had, as I romantically remember it, whether it's true or not, had almost half the time I was in charge in that job.

Q: And you were the main pipeline to New York.

BLAKE: That's right, and participating on a daily basis with Kissinger on his top staff meetings, the small staff meetings. It was a very fascinating time.

Q: Do you want to talk a little bit about Kissinger?

BLAKE: Oh, sure. Everybody wants to talk about Kissinger.

Q: I had normal contact with him.

BLAKE: I had the highest regard for his intellect. He was so often so right, but he was the toughest person I ever had to work with. He had a way of either ignoring you, or criticizing you. I don't think he ever said a nice thing to me. I'd hear from the Secretariat that he thought some piece of work we'd done had been fine, and that the President had said it was great. But I never heard this from him. He had a way, in his morning staff meetings, of systematically insulting everybody that was at the table, except two people. The two people were Winston Lord, who I think Henry thought of as a sort of Yankee swell.

Q: He was head of the Planning staff?

BLAKE: Yes, and Hal Sonnenfeldt. If Henry took Hal on, Hal would yell right back at him, and do it very effectively. So he would sort of pass when it came to those guys, wouldn't say anything nice to them, he'd just pass them. In that period - I hope I'm not being too indiscreet - the Deputy Secretary, Bob Ingersoll, used to take a most terrible verbal beating from Henry. It was humiliating. You got so used to the insults, as you knew you weren't

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being singled out. But it wasn't easy. I don't want to criticize Henry too much, because the positive part was a very well run State Department. A Secretary who knew how to play the political game, to keep the State Department in the center of things, who did it skillfully, and who was usually, I thought, quite right. I had some strong reservations about the whole period of the Brezhnev detente. I felt we were overselling detente to the American people, and Henry was doing most of it. Nixon was involved, but in my memory at least, he was keeping somewhat back from the Soviets. But the American people were brought to expect things that I felt would never happen, that we were going to be in for another roller coaster. Time proved that I was right.

Q: On the other hand it's a question of what one might have said if one had been around the Department last year.

BLAKE: There's a chance for change now. With Brezhnev, and all those old guys, there was no chance. None of us felt that there was any chance, and neither did Kissinger basically. It was politics. You're only in power for so many years, and Nixon had just been reelected.

Q: Well, Kissinger never listened to anybody except the Soviet ambassador anyway, did he?

BLAKE: Yes. He, for example, had excellent relations with the Brazilians, and was trying very hard to improve relations with the developing countries. It was a period also when he was expanding his knowledge and grasp. Up to that time he'd had no need to pay much attention to economics. For example, one of the things that I was involved in was the special session of the General Assembly on the New Economic Order which took place in that period. The preparations for that session were really quite fascinating; Kissinger started out with not much knowledge or grasp of a lot of these economic problems. In the end, though, he came through and made a really excellent speech up at the UN, partly of course, as one result of his quite good staff.

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Q: Yes, well I have heard people say he never did learn anything about economics, and never wanted to.

BLAKE: I think that was an earlier statement, and indeed unfair.

Q: Were there any particular highlights in this period in your line of work that you remember - the highlights - for the historical record?

BLAKE: No, I don't really think so. Nothing comes to mind right now. One of the interesting things I did in that period, was to be the back-up person for the Law of the Sea conferences that were going on. By back-up I mean, we had these big task forces that would beat out the very complicated positions that we were going to take on one or another aspect of the Law of the Sea. And then the delegation would go off to Caracas for a conference, or some place else, and they'd have to have somebody who would be the person back here to back them up, get new instructions, work with the Department of Defense, and this and that. That was a very interesting, and very informative period for me.

Q: It's such a complicated subject.

BLAKE: Yes, that's right.

Q: Of course, it was frustrating too, in a way.

BLAKE: Then there were many problems involving Israel, all the touchy political business of American Jewish groups trying to work with the White House. But I have nothing particularly special to offer on that.

Q: Don't I remember something about Sam Lewis, speaking of Israel, having been in IO? Was that before your time?

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BLAKE: When I left IO, Sam came in. I'd been Acting for a long time because Bill had already been transferred to take the job of Under Secretary at the UN. So really I left almost the day after he took over.

Q: I was trying to base my timing. You were Acting Assistant Secretary almost as long as I was, I guess probably longer than I was. I did it for over a year, but finally got a little bored with the idea of doing the work and not having the title. Could you give me just a few thoughts on the UN as a permanent organization? The strengths and weaknesses. Is it going to be able to constructively help keep the peace in the new world that we're in? You've had an unusually good experience in having been in New York for a long time, and in Washington for a long time, and then out on a UN operation in Zaire.

BLAKE: I think that the important characteristic of the UN in the period I was there, was essentially to provide a fig leaf to provide a framework for working out a rather difficult, complex problem that could be generally supported by the great powers, and generally agreed to by the non-aligned. That was to, certainly in the Cuban missile crisis, certainly in a lot of the aspects of Middle East peace keeping and so forth, the UN performed a very useful and important function. It really provides a sort of the old where you throw your used clothes and stuff in...

Q: Insoluble problem.

BLAKE: That's right. As far as being a dynamic force for peace, it seems to have become to some extent more recently. I think that this is probably just another reflection of the same thing I'm talking about. But as far as being a really dynamic force, I don't see that yet. I don't mean that it can't be, and I'm not talking down the importance of the UN. Of course, another very important role that the UN plays, is to provide a meeting place for global diplomacy. This goes on all the time. It's a sort of diplomat's bazaar. That's where we're meeting with the Albanians right now. All kinds of things go on all the time which do promote peace between two or more countries. But I think it was quite important that the

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American people, and the world as a whole, abandon their enormously high expectations of what you can get out of the UN. You don't get anything more than the sum of the national interests of the countries, and most often that tends to be the lowest common denominator.

Q: In the early days I used to feel - not early days, I'm talking about the '50s or perhaps the early '60s - I used to feel sometimes, being a pure bilateralist, that we spent a good deal of political capital getting favorable votes in the General Assembly.

BLAKE: I agree with that. That was particularly so of that period, later...

Q: Later we couldn't get them anyway.

BLAKE: Then we had that period when Senator Pat Moynihan was up there as the ambassador. He was trying hard to win political kudos. If countries didn't vote for us, he was determined they'd pay, and they'd pay a heavy price. That was very unsuccessful.

Q: It was short sighted.

BLAKE: It was putting more value on votes than it really deserved. It was a political ploy on his part, I think.

Q: It is getting very late, and you've been awfully patient, but I would like to get you to tell me a little more about what you've been doing since you left. You said on your previous tape that you essentially got out of the State Department in order to go climbing in the Himalayas, which was a great decision on your part. But then you got into numerous problems having to do with the key problems of ecology and population.

BLAKE: International environment, yes.

Q: International environment. Could you tell us organizationally a little about what you've been doing? I think it would be worth a record as to just...

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BLAKE: Yes. This post-retirement period... it's now almost 15 years, could be divided into two parts. I've been on more than my share of boards. For example, right now I'm vice chairman of Natural Resources Defense Council, and also vice chairman of the Wilderness Society. And I'm now on some other boards, but fewer than I was. This was a very good way to start. People asked me to come on board. But I very quickly had the feeling of wanting to do something of my own, to make my own contributions. I was asked to be a senior fellow of the International Institute for Environment Development. Barbara Ward and I worked very closely with IIED. I wrote several books on the aid process and how the environment fit into that. And then I got very taken up with the problems of tropical forests, and put together a group called The Tropical Forestry Working Group. It was a coalition of organizations working on how we could help some of the developing countries meet the problems of saving their forests. I worked on that subject for several years, until finally we were really quite successful. Part of the success in bringing the importance of the tropical forests to the attention of people all over the world, is it became a metaphor for international environment action. We began to get good results from the lobbying we were doing to the inside of the State Department, and the World Bank, etc. Then I became very interested in the agricultural problems, the developmental problems, and particularly the problems of how you're going to feed the growing billions of people in the world when at the same time the area of arable land is decreasing.

Q: It means the quality of it, probably.

BLAKE: Exactly. This is an incredible task in front of the human race. That's what I've been working on since then. I'm the chairman of a committee called The Committee for Sustainable Agriculture. We have 35 organizations as members. This morning I've been writing letters to the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House. I'm preparing for a meeting on Monday with the president of the World Bank to talk about some of their Latin American programs. Tomorrow morning we have a breakfast with the new head of

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AID to try to interest him in some of these problems. Life is, if anything, too busy, but very interesting.

Q: I think I owe you a great note of gratitude for having taken time out of this busy schedule for this very interesting conversation. I hope it will print well.

BLAKE: It's been fun to do it.

Q: I've enjoyed it immensely, a selfish attitude.

BLAKE: I appreciate your doing it.

End of interview